DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 190 163 IR 008 718

AUTHOR Smith, Harold F.
TITLE The Small Academic Library and the New Cooperation.
PUB DATE 28 Sep 79
NOTE 8p.: Paper presented at the Missouri Library Association Annual Conference (September 28, 1979). For related documents, see IR 008 715-720.

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Libraries; Budgets; Consortia; Costs; Higher Education; *Library Cooperation; Library Networks; *Library Services; *Resources

ABSTRACT

Although spiraling costs and reduced budgets require that small academic libraries form clusters to share resources and services, consortia and library networks so far have taken only tentative or shallow steps in this direction. Real and meaningful steps can and must be taken to develop joint acquisition policies, effective and timely interlibrary loan procedures, cooperative reference services, and division of responsibility for periodicals. Resource utilization in the areas of technical processes, staff, and equipment can be improved, and librarians need to adopt an attitude of interdependency and shared mutual responsibility. Clusters of five to ten libraries within a limited geographic proximity offer a feasible framework with an individual in each committed to seek out, develop, and maintain cooperative programs. (RAA)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED190163

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

THE SMALL ACADEMIC LIBRARY AND THE NEW COOPERATION

by

Harold F. Smith

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Frank Wranovix

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

THE SMALL ACADEMIC LIBRARY AND THE NEW COOPERATION

By Harold F. Smith
Director, Park College Library, Parkville

The retrenchment and hard times of higher education in the decade of the 70's has been reflected in college libraries by static or reduced budgets. The private liberal arts college library has generally had to carry on with the same size staff, or possibly has experienced reduction in staff. Book, periodical and binding budgets often have been areas where cuts have been made when institutional retrenchment has obliged the library to cut back. Those libraries fortunate enough to maintain their level of spending for materials have lost ground as the flood of publication has been coupled with the spiralling cost of materials. This has meant that many libraries have been crippled in their effort to provide information resources for students and faculty members.

For over a decade there has been a growing interest and attention among libraries in cooperative activities, first in consortia and then in library networking. In the last half-dozen years this movement toward cooperation has intensified in reaction to the stringencies of the 1970's. Generally these efforts have been tentative steps toward more effective utilization of multiple resources. Richard De Gennaro has observed that all too frequently cooperation is merely a pooling of poverty.[1] While this is often true I would contend--and this is the point of this paper--that there is much not being done that can be done. I do not believe that most library consortia or networks have taken more than tentative and shallow steps to share resources and personnel. Furthermore, I believe that it is imperative that small libraries work together in new or unusual ways that are unique--and that are productive. The yield of such joint library activities can be fruitful for their patrons. The failure to do so will mean for small

libraries slow death by strangled budget.

What can libraries do together that they have not tried before? Is there really a better way of fulfilling the cooperation we already subscribe to?

Definitely yes, for although there is a great deal of talk about inter-library cooperation, there is little cooperation and sharing that is highly productive. As an example, one of our most common ploys is the reciprocal library card that allows a user to check out materials from other libraries. This generally is a signature card, with so much red tape involved that neither the borrower nor the host library is very enthusiastic about it. But when have you heard of a cluster of libraries deciding to establish a uniform machine charging system so that a standard type of borrower's card can be used in any cluster library? For them to agree on a uniform check-out system would open the possibility of easier overdue notices, and easier fine collection. Master Charge can serve a wide clientele--why can't a library consortium do so? This has already been demonstrated to be feasible by the Aspen Public Library in Colorado which serves a transient clientele with that universal device, the credit card. Surely academic libraries can work out these mechanics, either with a national credit card or with their own uniform system. This is one example of a promising idea that could be made highly productive.

How many times have you heard your colleagues talk about joint acquisitions, and collection development? I have heard it repeatedly in the last fifteen years, but I must confess that it has made scarcely a ripple of difference in my own library's collecting, or in utilizing the resources of another library in my cluster. In my own instance it is time that our group make firm commitments on what we buy and what we pass up. An effective way to approach this would be for each library in the cluster to identify two or three fields in which it would collect intensively. It must accept that each other library will do likewise in other fields. Such a joint venture could have some of the aspects of a group of depart-

mental libraries in a university system. But the joint venture would clearly establish what each cluster library was responsible for in the overall pattern of joint acquisitions. Having done this much, each cluster library would then need to take the additional step of readily passing out its titles to other libraries and drawing on others' titles. Ways would have to be found to have each cluster library's materials easily located and readily available to all users in the consortium. This might imply cross-listing of catalogs, or a union locator file, but most certainly a much freer arrangement of inter-library lending. The point is that members would buy for all libraries in the group and then loan to all other libraries in the group.

I suppose someone will point out that this was the intent of the Farmington plan, and that that noble experiment went down the tubes in 1972 after 25 years. I don't see this as proof that such a joint effort won't work. After all, the Farmington plan dealt with much more esoteric material, material that was collected for depository purposes. For the small academic library we are talking about materials that are apt to have a much more intensive use.

At this point it might be well to talk about periodicals, for we must be prepared to share them more readily too. I know this may bring shudders to you in light of the new copyright law. But there is a wide dispersal of available periodical titles in any grouping of libraries, and I am continually amazed at the variety of holdings one can find in neighboring libraries when he starts to search for a fugitive or little-used title.

Here again the concept of branch or departmental libraries would be a model necessary to effective cooperation. There will always be a basic core of highly popular periodical titles that all member libraries will have--30 to 50 perhaps, such as *Time, Newsweek, New Republic,* and other heavily read titles. Beyond that, the cluster of libraries might think of dividing their subscription

lists with one library concentrating in titles in music, another in political science, still another in communications. Concomitant with this idea is the willingness to share periodical resources by providing a delivery system between participants. Call it a dispersed periodicals bank concept if you will. A union list of titles and holdings would serve as a location file for all libraries to use.

Both of the foregoing types of materials imply a system of quick and easy inter-library lending. Gone are the days when we can send the ALA inter-library loan form via U.S. Mail. Where we can have inter-changeable borrowers cards we will. But where we have to rely on library-to-library loans--inter-library loans--we must short-circuit the slow, red tape methods we have used in the past. We need to use the telephone or the teletype, or whatever it takes, in order to get same-day or next-day response to a request for material for our patron. The inter-library loan librarian must think of himself as a broker for materials loans. The director of a library must make the inter-library loan function one of the top priorities in his service offerings.

De Gennaro points out that the big costs in libraries are staff costs. He is right, and here is where libraries must particularly seek to share. One of the lessons of OCLC is that staff utilization (of catalogers) can be altered when a joint process is used. What can we as college librarians do to share, for instance, joint reference services? Can we schedule our reference personnel jointly so that all cluster libraries can telephone one or another library when our own reference person is not available so that our patrons can count on having reference help 70 or 80 hours a week including nights and weekends? Can we contract among ourselves for reference services when there are fewer reference librarians than there are libraries in our cluster?

Let me suggest one more way to share, although what I am offering here

certainly is not an exhaustive or comprehensive list. Can we not, in our consortia, find new ways of equipment utilization? We talk about using computers in libraries, and I think we should find ways for several librarians to share one outlet. But we don't even make good use of such conventional equipment as the telephone, the teletype, or radio. Closed circuit TV is still pretty much a toy. Yet enough of our libraries have these, as well as copying and other office-type equipment, that we could exploit their use in cooperative ways much more creatively and productively than we do.

Much of what I suggest here is what we used to call scientific management. We are only beginning to see libraries apply this kind of a model to providing information service. We in the small libraries have been the slowest to think in these terms. Although these concepts are least familiar to us, we in the small college need to think in these new ways, for we are the ones hardest-pressed and closest to financial disaster.

And this brings us to the imperative need for the small college librarian to change his attitudes. He can no longer feel he is in a scene apart where he can content himself with whatever his library's collection contains. He must suddenly think of his shop as a branch of a universal public library. Anything in his collection must be available for use in any other branch of the universal public library. He will be able, likewise, to draw on other branches for his own users' needs. Only by taking a library "one world" view can he do this. He may be able to get some help from major resource libraries, but he needs first to share with his peers in other small colleges.

Is this an impossible dream? Can the small college librarian alter his attitudes? He must, for he can no longer afford to do otherwise. Population projections for the 1980's show a decline in college-age students, and student

attitudes about higher education do not comfort us that we can continue to run small libraries as we always have. To do so would resemble too closely what eventually happened to the corner grocery store.

If we change our attitudes it could be the start of a new era in small college librarianship. To do so will require two things of us. The first will necessitate librarians forming small groupings or clusters for effective action. Libraries of like characteristics in groups of five to ten would seem to provide the most feasible framework. Geographic proximity to each other is important to their being able to work out many of the mechanics of effective cooperative programs.

The second requirement is that there be at least one key person in each cluster who seeks to make cooperative programs go, who urges, moves, shakes, persuades, cajoles, pleads, argues, finesses and persists in trying to get the group to do those things we all know need to be done.

Hopeless? Perhaps. But it could be the new breath of life for the small college library in an age when everything seems to be done on a grand scale. To do so will require us to change our attitudes about where we and our library fit in the larger structure of librarianship. But if we do, we can be the new craftsmen in an age of mass production!

FOOTNOTES

1. De Gennaro, Richard, "Copyright, Resource Sharing, and Hard Times: A View From the Field," *American Libraries*, Vol. 8, No. 8, September 1977, p. 433.